



Eco-friendly kit

How to make green choices when buying outdoor gear

Words Joe Pontin

You love the outdoors. You want to protect it for future generations. So would you be surprised to learn that your favourite rain jacket – the one you wear hiking – probably contains toxins harmful to the environment?

In 2012, Greenpeace publicised the fact that many outdoor-gear companies use harmful chemicals known as PFCs (perfluorinated compounds) in the manufacture of their kit. That includes clothing, tents, rucksacks and boots. And they also found that PFC pollution has spread to some of the most remote places on Earth. That's bad news because PFCs don't biodegrade in the environment. They are here for good.

The problem for outdoor-gear makers is that PFCs are devilishly useful in waterproofing fabrics. They help manufacturers create fabrics that breathe, letting air in and out,

while repelling water. Harmless alternatives appear to be hard to come by. For this reason, many outdoor firms still use PFCs. These include companies that have carefully cultivated green reputations. Patagonia, for instance, planned to go PFC-free in 2020, but is still developing its own replacement technology.

Other leading brands have successfully introduced PFC-free waterproof fabrics, or gone entirely PFC-free, among them Vaude, Jack Wolfskin and Fjällräven. Still others are in the process of phasing out their use; this year, Deuter backpacks go PFC-free, for example. All of which highlights the fact that even apparently innocent things such as buying a rain jacket can have a far-reaching environmental impact.

If you want to make buying choices that minimise harm to the planet, there are no easy answers. But here is some food for thought.

GREEN BUYS

Outdoor clothing and kit that minimises impact on the planet

1 Braemar Organic SV Smock, Hilltrek, £260

A classic walker's jacket. Handmade in the Highlands from super-tough, PFC-free Ventile fabric (woven from organic cotton) it is windproof, breathable and showerproof. For a fully waterproof jacket, upgrade to double-layer Ventile (from £300). Repairs available. hilltrek.co.uk

2 Trail 22 Backpack, Deuter, £90

Free from harmful PFCs, this 22-litre daypack is designed for vigorous days out in the hills. Ventilated material on the belt, harness and back make the pack breathable. deutergb.co.uk

3 Selkirk Cabin Sock, Tentree, £19.95

These thick unisex socks are made from 70% recycled polyester – equivalent to three plastic bottles. Not only that, but Tentree promises to plant 10 trees for every product it sells. tentree.com

4 Men's Velez Jacket, Páramo, £300

Unlike most outdoor gear companies, Páramo has never used PFCs in its waterproof clothing. And its Nikwax Directional fabric is probably the most reliable waterproof fabric out there. This slim-fitting jacket is soft but durable, and the close-fitting hood is extremely effective. Páramo will make repairs, and a recycling scheme is available. paramo-clothing.com

5 Tare It Up Food Canisters, Klean Kanteen, £18.95 (small), £22.95 (large)

When your plastic food boxes wear out, consider replacing them with these stainless-steel containers. They should last a lifetime, and the leakproof top means you can carry wet food safely in your bag. kleankanteen.co.uk

6 Women's Miskanti Fleece Jacket, Vaude, £130

This wonderfully warm but low-profile fleece cuts plastic pollution thanks to its soft Tencel lining. Tencel is made from wood cellulose and its fibres biodegrade harmlessly. vaude.com



1 DO I NEED NEW?

Most of us love getting new stuff. But the fashion industry – of which outdoor gear is part – is, according to the UN Environment Programme, one of the most polluting in the world, responsible for 10% of annual global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. So before you buy, ask yourself: can your existing jacket be repaired instead, or reproofed to restore its water repellency? Can those boots be re-soled? If you're not sure, try a specialist such as Lancashire Sports Repairs, lancashiresportsrepairs.co.uk.

Bear in mind that some outdoor brands operate a repair service for their own products, including Patagonia and Páramo. If your gear is beyond repair, it has never been easier to buy good quality second-hand kit, thanks to online marketplaces such as eBay. And while you're at it, if you have some good-quality gear you no longer need, why not give it away or sell it on and let someone else make use of it, instead of throwing it out?

2 BUY TO LAST

If you have to buy, go for the best you can afford. Ask whether it seems durable enough to take years of wear. Avoid this year's hot colour, or you might be sick of it by next year. Instead, go for colours you've always loved, and probably always will. Or buy a neutral hue, and accessorise with on-trend colours.

Be conservative with your clothing size, not aspirational. That way something is likely to fit you for longer.

Check whether your object of desire can be repaired – especially zips. Can those shiny new hiking boots be re-soled in the future; can you reuse the uppers?

3 GO FOR GREEN MATERIALS

Polyester is made using fossil fuels, including petroleum and coal, and production requires a lot of energy; the CO2 emissions of a polyester shirt are about double that of cotton. To cut your carbon impact, look for fabrics made from recycled polyester – they have a 32% lower CO2 cost than virgin polyester. There's a win. Also, look out for clothing with the Bluesign emblem, which is awarded to sustainably produced fabrics. It may be more expensive, but organic



cotton also has a reduced impact on the planet; among other benefits, it's produced without the use of pesticides.

Merino-wool base layers have natural antimicrobial properties and remain fresh-smelling even after wearing for days – as a result, you don't have to wash these items so often, saving on water and electricity use. And they're made from natural fibres that biodegrade.

4 CAN I REDUCE PLASTIC POLLUTION?

The yarn most commonly used in outdoor clothing – the aforementioned polyester – sheds microplastics into the environment in the form of tiny fibres, especially when washed. A single 6kg domestic wash has the potential to release as many as 700,000 fibres of all kinds.

To reduce the release of microfibrils, consider washing your gear in a special bag to catch fibres, such as the Guppyfriend Washing Bag, before your machine pumps them into the drain and out into the ocean. en.guppyfriend.com

5 TAKE CARE OF YOUR KIT

Needless to say, you can extend the lifespan of your gear by looking after it. Walking boots should be kept clean. Dry leather ones slowly so they won't crack.

Many waterproof jackets need regular washing in special cleaning fluids (tech-wash) and reproofing to restore the water-repellency. If you leave your jacket too long before doing this, it may never regain its effectiveness. Storm, Nikwax and Granger's are among those selling PFC-free tech-wash and reproofers.

Researching the green credentials of outdoor gear requires a kind of methodical approach that doesn't suit everyone – but you never know, you might actually find it quite satisfying. [©]

7 JWP Shell Jacket for women, Jack Wolfskin, £130

This lightweight jacket made from a PFC-free, recycled-polyester fabric is perfect for stowing in a pocket of your pack in case of wet weather. jack-wolfskin.co.uk



8 Keb Eco-Shell Jacket (men's and women's versions), Fjällräven, £450

My favourite walking jacket in five years of reviewing for this magazine, the Keb Eco-Shell was ahead of the game on release in 2015. The PFC-free, recycled-polyester fabric is soft but substantial; the big chest pockets are brilliantly functional, and it's still in great nick (with repeated reproofing). fjallraven.co.uk



9 Rainbird Jacket, Finisterre, £110

Proof that PFC-free rain jackets needn't cost a fortune. Very light, soft and slightly stretchy, this unisex jacket is made from 100% recycled polyester. Durability might be an issue in the long term. Finisterre.com



10 Biopod DownWool Nature Sleeping Bag, Grüezi, €399.99

Go plastic-free with this all-natural cotton bag. Wooden buttons replace zips, and it's stuffed with a 70:30 mixture of down and wool, a clever innovation because wool absorbs moisture, helping to keep the down dry and warm. (This helped the bag win Product of the year in the Outdoor Industry Awards 2019.) en.gz-bag.de



11 Bellamont III Plus men's shoes, Aku, £143.89

These stylish, super-comfortable Italian walking shoes boast leather uppers made with a chrome-free tanning process. The Vibram Predator II outsoles are grippy, and can be resoled if sent to a specialist. trekkinn.com



12 Mineral Sun Cream and Insect Repellent, incognito, £14.99 (75ml)

Many sun creams contain microplastics – but not this one. It's also Soil Association-approved and contains no harmful chemicals. lessmosquito.com



Go online See more detailed reviews on our website: countryfile.com/country-kit